

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 775

By Matheny

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) for their service to the United States of America during World War II.

WHEREAS, our nation was conceived by individuals who were willing to sacrifice their personal safety, concerns, and lives to ensure our individual and collective freedom, and the citizens of the Volunteer State have, throughout the years, willingly forsaken the comforts and securities of inaction by answering the call to duty against the enemies of this great Nation, risking their lives and leaving their loved ones behind to honorably safeguard the freedoms and liberties we all hold dear; and

WHEREAS, just such a noble and selfless group of individuals were the Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II; known as the "WASP," these individuals were the first women in history to fly American military aircraft, piloting fighters, bombers, transports, and training aircraft in defense of America's freedom more than sixty years ago; and

WHEREAS, these women faced overwhelming cultural and gender bias against women while performing in nontraditional roles and overcame multiple injustices and inequities in order to serve their country. Through their actions, the WASP were the catalyst for revolutionary reform in the integration of women pilots into the Armed Services; and

WHEREAS, during the early months of World War II, there was a severe shortage of combat pilots and Jacqueline Cochran, America's leading woman pilot of the time, convinced General Hap Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces, that women, if given the same training as men, would be equally capable of flying military aircraft and could then take over some of the stateside military flying jobs, thereby releasing hundreds of male pilots for combat duty; and

WHEREAS, the severe loss of male combat pilots made the necessity of utilizing women pilots to help in the war effort clear to General Arnold, and a women's pilot training program was soon approved; and

WHEREAS, at that time, twenty-eight patriotic women pilots had been organized by Nancy Love as the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) to assist in the war effort; known as the "Originals," the first ten female pilots were hired for the Ferry Division of the Air Transport Command in September of 1942 and their first ferrying missions were flown in October of 1942; and

WHEREAS, Nashville native Cornelia Fort was the second of the "Originals" to sign up with the squadron and was the first of the WAFS to be killed when she was involved in a mid-air collision near Merkel, Texas, on March 21, 1943. In total, thirty-eight women would give their last full measure of devotion in service to their country as members of the WAFS or the WASP; and

WHEREAS, in August of 1943, General Arnold ordered that all women pilots flying military aircraft, including the twenty-eight civilian women ferry pilots, would be designated as "WASP," Women Airforce Service Pilots; immediately thereafter, more than 25,000 American women applied for training, out of which group 1,830 were accepted and took the oath; and

WHEREAS, of those nearly 2,000 women, exactly 1,074 of those trainees successfully completed the twenty-one to twenty-seven weeks of Army Air Forces flight training, whereupon they graduated and received their Army Air Forces orders to report to an air base; and

WHEREAS, on November 16, 1942, the first class of twenty-nine women pilots reported to the Municipal Airport in Houston, Texas, and embarked upon the same military flight training as the male Army Air Forces cadets; due to a lack of adequate facilities at the airport, the training program was moved to Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas, three months later; and

WHEREAS, WASP were eventually stationed at 120 Army air bases all across America; they flew more than 60,000,000 miles in every type of aircraft and on every type of assignment flown by the male Army Air Forces pilots, except those involving combat; and

WHEREAS, WASP assignments included test piloting, instructor piloting, towing targets for air-to-air gunnery practice, ground-to-air anti-aircraft practice, ferrying, transporting

personnel and cargo (including parts for the atomic bomb), simulated strafing, smoke laying, night tracking, and flying drones; and

WHEREAS, the WASP served fearlessly and performed their duties with dedication and comport. In October of 1943, when male pilots were refusing to fly the B-26 Martin Marauder (known as the "Widowmaker") due to its fatality records, General Arnold ordered WASP Director Jacqueline Cochran to select twenty-five WASP for training to fly the B-26. Their performance in this endeavor was superior and without accident, proving to the male pilots that it was safe to fly; and

WHEREAS, when the thirty-eight WAFS and WASP who died in service lost their lives, their bodies were sent home in poorly crafted pine boxes and their burials were held at the expense of their families or classmates. There were no gold stars allowed in their parents' windows and, because they were not considered military, no American flags were allowed on their coffins, a sad reflection of the discrimination they faced; and

WHEREAS, in 1944, General Arnold made a personal request to Congress to militarize the WASP, a request which was denied. On December 7, 1944, in a speech to the last graduating class of WASP, General Arnold stated: "You and more than 900 of your sisters have shown you can fly wingtip to wingtip with your brothers. I salute you... We of the Army Air Force are proud of you. We will never forget our debt to you"; and

WHEREAS, with victory in World War II almost certain, the WASP were quietly and unceremoniously disbanded on December 20, 1944. There were no honors, no benefits, and very little official gratitude; just as they had paid their own way to enter training, the women had to pay for their return to their homes after their honorable service to the military; and

WHEREAS, the WASP military records were immediately sealed, stamped "classified" or "secret," and filed away in government archives, unavailable to the historians who wrote the history of WWII or the scholars who compiled the history text books used today. With many of the records not declassified until the 1980s, the WASP story is a missing chapter in the history of the Air Force, the history of aviation, and the history of the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, in 1977, thirty-three years after the WASP were disbanded, Congress finally voted to give the WASP veteran status, but these heroic pilots were not invited to the signing

ceremony at the White House. It was not until 1979 that honorable discharges were granted to the WASP and 1984 that their medals were delivered to them through the mail in plain brown envelopes; and

WHEREAS, in the late 1970s, more than thirty years after the WASP flew in World War II, women were permitted to attend military pilot training in the United States Armed Forces. Since that time, thousands of women aviators flying support aircraft have benefitted from the service of the WASP, following in the footsteps of some of the bravest women the United States of America has ever known; and

WHEREAS, in 1993, the WASP were once again referenced during congressional hearings regarding the contributions that women are able to make to the military, hearings which eventually led to women being instated as pilots of military fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft in combat. Hundreds of United States servicewomen combat pilots have seized the opportunity to fly fighter aircraft in recent conflicts, a direct result of the pioneering spirit of the WASP; and

WHEREAS, the WASP have maintained a tight-knit community forged by the common experiences of serving their country during war. As part of their desire to educate Americans on the history of WASP, its members have assisted "Wings Across America," an organization dedicated to educating the public about the remarkable accomplishments of these WWII veterans; and

WHEREAS, the WASP have been honored with exhibits at numerous museums, including the Smithsonian Institution; the Women in Military Service to America Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery; the National Museum of the United States Air Force at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio; the National WASP WWII Museum in Sweetwater, Texas; and the 8th Air Force Museum in Savannah, Georgia; and

WHEREAS, on July 1, 2009, President Barack Obama and the United States Congress awarded the WASP the Congressional Gold Medal, which will be permanently displayed at the Smithsonian Institution. Three of the roughly 300 surviving WASP were on hand to witness the ceremony, during which President Obama said: "The Women Airforce Service Pilots courageously answered their country's call in a time of need while blazing a trail for the brave

women who have given and continue to give so much in service to this nation since. Every American should be grateful for their service, and I am honored to sign this bill to finally give them some of the hard-earned recognition they deserve”; and

WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee is proud to be the home of five surviving members of the WASP: Mrs. Martha M. Carpenter of Memphis, Ms. Lillian E. Goodman of Memphis, Mrs. Barbara M. Robinson of Tullahoma, Mrs. Doris B. Tanner of Union City, and Ms. Frankie Yearwood of Memphis. It is wholly fitting that the members of this body should pause to remember and recognize the remarkable contributions to this Nation made by these gallant women and all who flew as members of the Women Airforce Service Pilots during World War II: now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor and commend the Women Airforce Service Pilots upon their receipt of the Congressional Gold Medal, reflecting on their selfless courage and commitment to military excellence and applauding their bravery and forthright commitment in the face of danger and discrimination, even as we humbly extend to them our deep and heartfelt thanks for their distinguished service to these United States during World War II.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.